

RHODOGRAVURE

NEWSLETTER OF THE DELAWARE VALLEY RHODODENDRON SOCIETY :::::::::: AUTUMN 2025



Planting day at Tyler Arboretum, with DVRS members and Tyler personnel in the background.

Special Feature Edition: The Hybridizer Garden at Tyler Arboretum

It's real ... and it's growing

With 87 plants in the ground, Hybridizer Garden at Tyler is started

It took more than five years: this fall, the rhododendron hybridizer test garden at Tyler Arboretum became a real thing. Now what it needs are sun and rain, weeding and time, so that 35 cultivars from 21 relatively local hybridizers can be evaluated.

On October 1, 87 rhododendron plants went in the ground, largely in twos and threes of a given hybrid. What had been a weedy, overgrown space at Tyler is now a new garden, conveniently situated close to the arboretum's historic rhododendron collection. It is the critical milestone borne of the musings and what-if-ing of a handful of rhododendron enthusiasts in the southeastern quadrant of Pennsylvania.

Credit Jerry O'Dell with the germ of the idea. In his capacity working with the genus at Tyler, he had helped create an azalea garden, and he floated the concept of an elepidote version to hybridizer Perc Moser and propagator Karel Bernady. Ooh, good idea, said they. The conversation was expanded to include two more hybridizers, Joe Minahan of Camp Hill and Tom Ahern of Bethlehem. They were all frustrated with the fact that the commercial rhododendron world was way out of date, selling a limited number of cultivars, most of which had been around for decades. The three hybridizers were

acutely aware that they were among a large number of hobbyist and professional breeders who had developed hundreds of hardy hybrids that greatly expanded the diversity of colors, foliage forms, shrub shapes and growth rates. How could the best of these alluring new hybrids become a part of the wider gardening world, instead of being minimally propagated and, sadly, often doomed to extinction?

The answer (a really condensed interpretation): Just the facts, ma'am. That is, prove how good certain new hybrids are, with documented information on growth performance, and make the information available to the wider rhododendron world and the commercial gardening system. How? Easy, plant a garden, collect data. Well not so easy, but clearly doable.

Speed version of the idea-to-reality sequence. With Joe Minahan in his last days, Perc and Tom recruited Michael Martin Mills, the North American registrar, to join the Founding Task Force. Tyler was formally approached and responded positively, leading to negotiations and a detailed Memorandum of Understanding. A nomination and selection process was created for deciding which of myriad cultivars to include. A sophisticated fundraising effort was carried out. Cuttings were taken and rooted, using the procedures developed by the Greater Philadelphia Chapter. Tyler began clearing the designated plot of brambles and worse. Rooted cuttings were grown to three-gallon-pot size. Shovels went into the ground.

Folks attending the October 19 Delaware Valley Rhododendron Society meeting at Tyler (see Page 3 for details) will be able to stroll over to the site and see the trial garden in its infancy. And perhaps meet Rowan Saroka, the Wister Rhododendron Gardener on the Tyler staff, who has been and will continue to be a key figure in the project – among other things she designed the layout of the garden.



Perc Moser getting one of the 87 plants happily situated.

What's next? The real work. Trialing new cultivars is not for the instant-gratification set. Rhododendrons are long-term garden commitments – many who plant a one will move to new digs when the plant is reaching its prime. Therefore, multiple years of observations and data will be needed. Is Cultivar 3313 a shy bloomer until it's five or eight years old? Does Cultivar 632 hate too much sun? Does Cultivar 705 never outgrow the rambunctious new-growth phase of young plants? Uh-oh, it seems Cultivar 1019 is very prone to chlorosis. Why did Cultivars 1807 and 6617 die after only three years? And how does climate change affect everything?

One task is devising an evaluation and criteria system (probably a huge spread sheet for the 35 cultivars with various data cells). Then, several times every year, the data will need to be collected on site. At some point – no guessing how many years from now – observations will be turned into a report that indicates which of the 35 appear to be the good-doers of the 21st century. With an update appropriate several years later.

The sign greeting Tyler visitors.

Fundraising must also continue. The Memorandum of Understanding requires paying Tyler \$4,000 a year. There is money on deposit with the national ARS for this purpose, but it's not enough for the long-term needs of the garden, which will require weeding, watering, signage, mulching and other maintenance for the long haul.

Given what's taken place already, maybe the appropriate response is: Gosh, it took only five years?

Following are lists of the cultivars now growing in the test garden, as well as the people who have been involved in and supportive of the project. More photos on Page 4.

Cultivar	Hybridizer*	Cultivar	Hybridizer*
Ahern 101**	Tom Ahern	'Kenny Mac'	Sandra McDonald
'Anita Gehnrich'	Philip Waldman	'Lavender Ice'	Hank Schannen
'April Rhapsody'	A. and S. Anderson	'Love Child'	Schannen
'Austin's Firecracker'	John Doppel	'Lumos'	Ahern
'Bisque'	Ahern	'Madeline Winter'	Moser
'Bob's Peach'	Bob Bondira	'Mike O'Hara'	Minahan
'Cause of Our Joy'	Joseph Minahan	'Rhein's Luna'	William L. Rhein
'Cosmic Candy'	Perc Moser	'Rhein's Picotee'	Rhein
'Cyclops'	Ron Rabideau	'Ruth's Showstopper'	Doppel
'Cynosure'	Benjamin Shapiro	'Scintillation x 'Apritan'	Donald Hyatt
'Diane's Delight'	Doppel	'Sidney V. Burns'	Richard Murcott
'Dream of Kings'	Kathleen Frederick	'Sugaree'	Moser
'Elmer's Gift'	Elmer Morris	'Sun Dust'	Andersons
'Garnet Thomas'	Ahern	'Tiered Yellow'	Minahan
'Gilbert Myers'	Helen Myers	'Winsome Winnie'	Dennis MacMullan
'Great Gatsby'	Werner Brack	'White Elegance'	Brack
'Hannah Grace'	Ahern	'Yellow Eyes'	A.R. Fitzburgh
'John C. White'	George Ring		

* Includes growers of open-pollinated seed

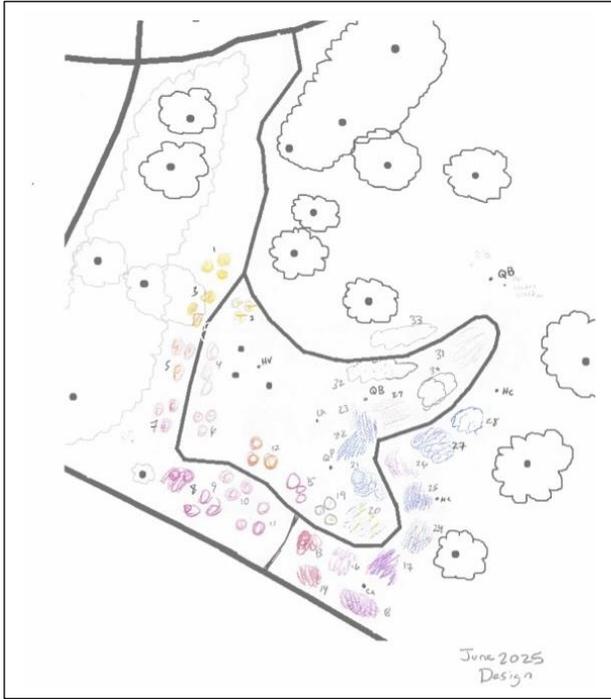
** *R. pseudochrysanthum* X (*degronianum* subsp. *yakushmanum* x *pachysanthum*)

Selection Committee

Tom Ahern	Perc Moser	Steven Wright
Karel Bernady	Ronald Rabideau	Peter Zale
Mike Karkowski	Carol Segree	
Michael Martin Mills	Christian Stolz	

Planting Crew

Perc Moser	Mimi Favre	Bruce Keyser
Tom Ahern	Ron Rabideau	Bill Halberstadt
Rowan Saroka	Bob Smetana	Tyler volunteers



Clockwise from top left:
The planting scheme for the Hybridizer Garden at Tyler Arboretum, showing color groupings; Rowan Saroka, Bud Gressman, Perc Moser on delivery day; Tom Ahern and a few of the 87 plants; Ron Rabideau (left) and Mimi Favre (right) on planting day.

Photos here and on Pages 1-2 by Perc Moser, Tom Ahern and Tyler Arboretum staff.

Founding Task Force

Tom Ahern
Karel Bernady
Michael Martin Mills

Joseph Minahan (deceased)
Perc Moser

Funders

Stuart Brooks
Michael O’Hara
Debby Sauer
Carolyn R. Segree
John Weygandt
Marshall “Bud” Gressman
Minahan Family
Michael Martin Mills

Tom Lloyd
Karel Bernady
Tom Ahern
Royal Furer
Jonathan Wood
Cathy Keim
Robert Smetana
Lorraine Rubin

Steve and Darlene Henning
Percival B. Moser, III
Julia E. Klees
Bill Mangels
Donald Hyatt
Mike and Marie Zaia
Howard and Rita Bickerstaff
Donn and Louise Teubner

American Rhododendron Society Chapters:

Delaware Valley,
Greater Philadelphia,
Lehigh Valley,
Middle Atlantic,
Valley Forge